



**ACT**

# 5 Questions Students Must Ask

**WHILE COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING**  
JUNIOR YEAR EDITION

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# Introduction

## Welcome to your junior year!

Do you sense something a little different this school year? A sense of excitement —maybe even control—over your future? Or maybe you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious about your future. Are you getting your first letters from colleges or universities? Earning your first paychecks from a weekend job? Feeling the urge that it's time to "get serious" about future stuff?

And let's not forget balancing all of that with homework, studying, friends, sports, activities—all the challenges of being a junior. It's easy to get stressed out.

## DON'T WORRY!

All it takes to prepare yourself for the future is a little planning—and your junior year is the perfect time to start!

This guide, from the college and career readiness experts at ACT, maps out ways you can start preparing for your future right now. It all starts by asking yourself five basic questions, then figuring out the answers.

**LET'S GET STARTED WITH QUESTION NO. 1...**





# Question 1

**‘WHAT DO I WANT TO BE?’**



“

**Life is either a  
daring adventure  
or nothing at all.**

“

- HELEN KELLER

# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

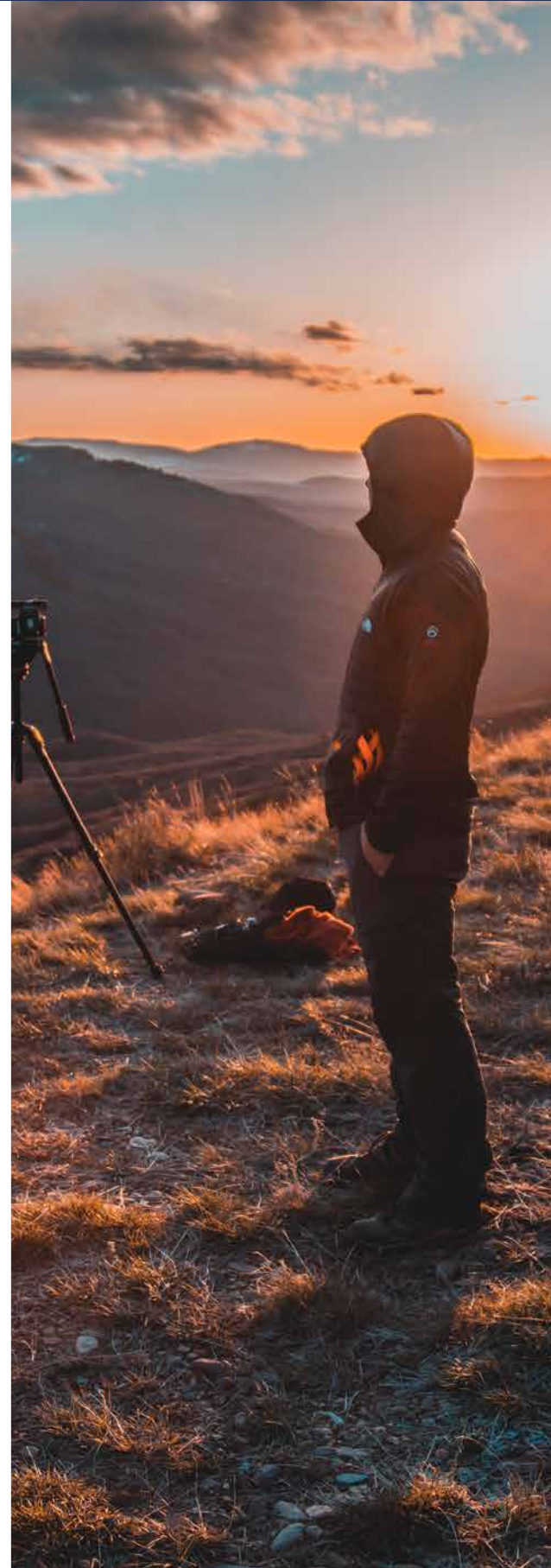
You’re at the age where you’ve probably had to get yourself from one place to another (driving, traveling) without help from an adult. **Even if it wasn’t far away, you needed directions or a GPS to get there.**

### THAT’S JUST LIKE LIFE.

Having a direction in life is key. Making a plan for success is the best way to make that success happen.

And now, your junior year, is the time to start that planning, if you haven’t already.

**IT ALL STARTS WITH THE FIRST STEP...**





# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

### Ask yourself:

1. What do I like to do?
2. What am I good at?
3. What’s important to me?

Consider your answers the big “X” on the roadmap to your career.

Knowing who you are and what matters to you (your interests, abilities, and values) can guide every decision about your direction after high school.

Make a list of answers to each question and look for repeated words and phrases (“animals,” “caring for others,” “sports,” “leadership”) that might help point you in a career direction.

Or, maybe you’re not sure you can answer these questions yourself. Try finding someone who knows you well and ask them those questions about you. The answers might surprise you, and hopefully you’ll find encouragement and direction from them.



# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

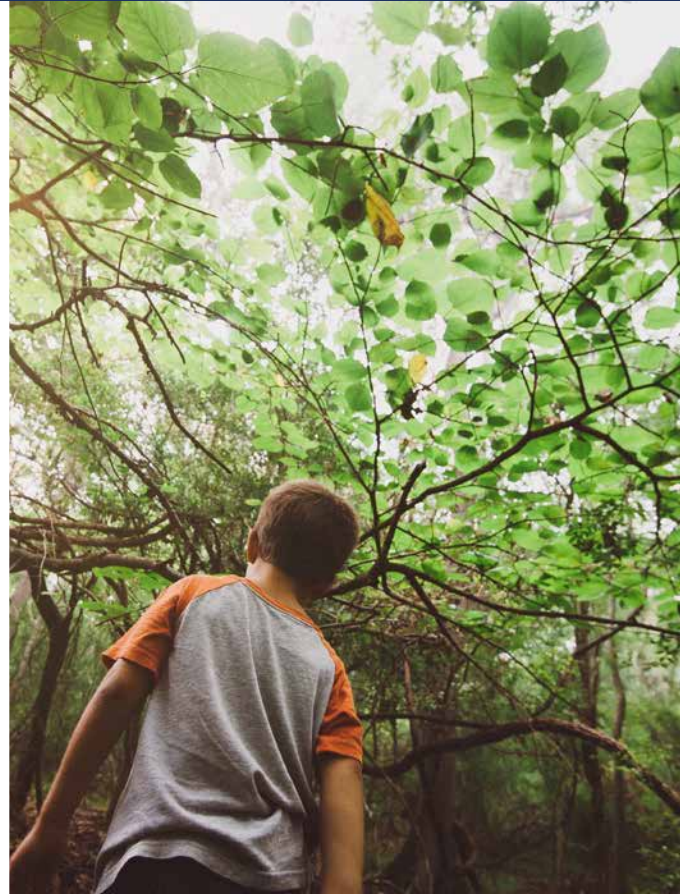
### “Think out loud” about your future.

It’s never too early to think about your direction in life. Think about what you do well, what you enjoy doing, and how your interests and goals compare those needed in a career.

But don’t do it alone. It’s time to get out there and talk with older students and adults about what career options are available for you.

- **DO SOME VOLUNTEER WORK** for a local nonprofit group or volunteer organization, especially one that looks interesting to you.
- **TALK TO THE ADULTS IN YOUR LIFE** about their careers and what they like best about them.
- **“JOB SHADOW”** at a business that sounds interesting to you.
- **SET UP REGULAR MEETINGS** with your school counselor about career options.
- **FIND A MENTOR**—a person with knowledge and experience who can help you figure out your career goals.
- **TALK WITH CLASSMATES** with similar goals about how they plan to get there.

Keep in mind, too, that your career goals today don’t have to be your goals tomorrow. They’re the first steps in a long journey with plenty of room to adjust and evolve as you examine careers and get more experience trying them out.





# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

### Where will you go after high school?

Your counselor will tell you that continuing your education after high school (at a two- or four-year college, technical school, trade school, etc.) may be the most ideal way to go. There are lots of reasons to go to college, but here are two of the most important:

- **MOST FUTURE JOBS WILL REQUIRE AT LEAST SOME COLLEGE EDUCATION BEFORE HIRING.** The Center on Education and the Workforce says 65% of future jobs will require education beyond high school.
- **GOING TO COLLEGE MOST OFTEN RESULTS IN HIGHER JOB SALARIES.** The US Bureau of Labor Statistics says workers with bachelor’s degrees earn, on average, \$1 million more than workers with high school diplomas over their lifetime.

You might have friends and classmates who not only know they’re headed to college but also have already chosen which college, major, dorm, etc. Are these people making you feel overwhelmed or behind the curve?

### DON’T WORRY!

Take a deep breath. It’s OK not to know what your future holds. Just take it one step at a time.



# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

### THE FIRST STEP TOWARD A BRIGHT FUTURE IS EXPLORING YOUR CAREER INTERESTS.

One great, **FREE RESOURCE** is ACT Profile, which takes your personal interests and helps you create a personalized map to college and work, including which careers and majors link with your interests, abilities, and values.

Fill out an interest inventory on ACT Profile and get personalized, interactive career maps and information about colleges and careers that link directly to you and your interests.

The logo for ACT Profile beta. 'ACT' is in a large, dark blue serif font with a red swoosh under the 'A'. 'Profile' is in a red sans-serif font, and 'beta' is in a smaller, dark blue sans-serif font to the right.

**[CLICK HERE TO TRY IT OUT.](#)**



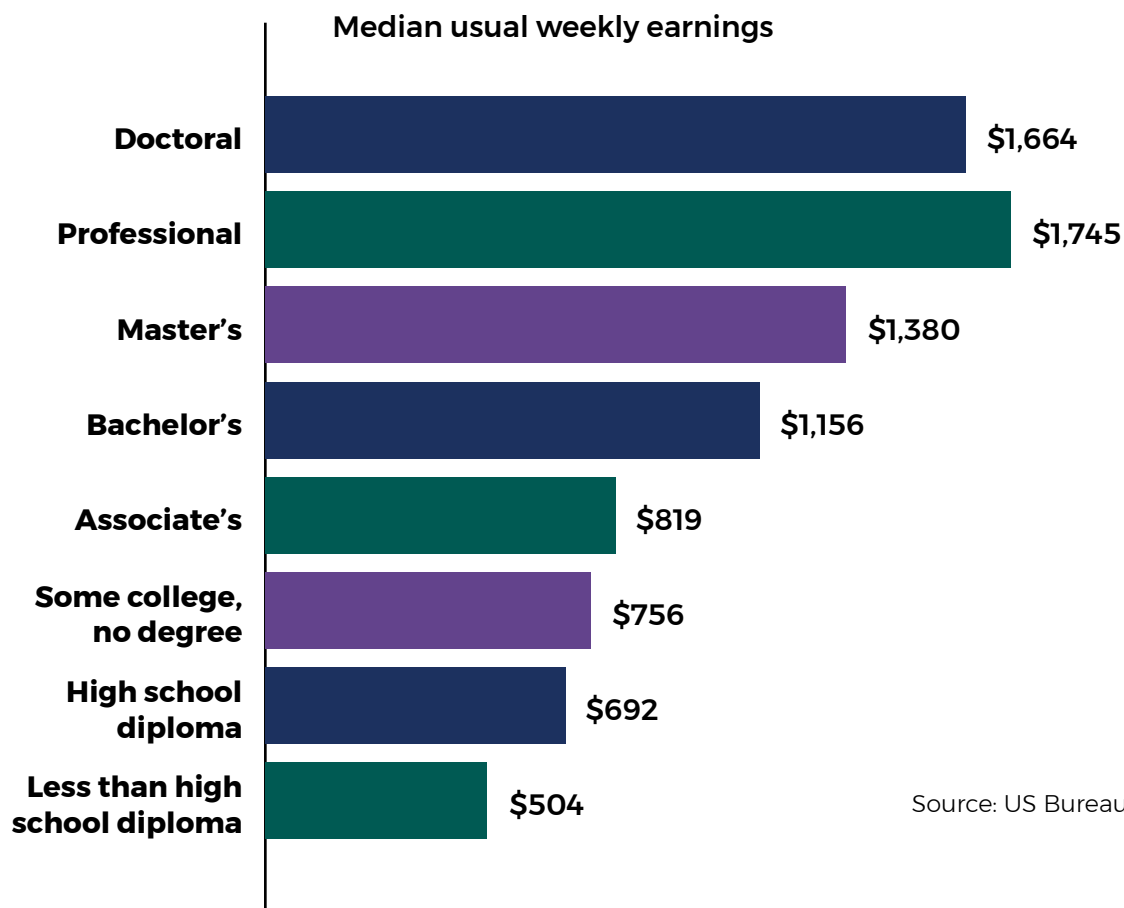
# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

### LEARN MORE, EARN MORE

One important thing to consider when choosing whether to attend college is the amount of money you can expect to make in your chosen career. Government research shows that salaries rise considerably when you have a college degree—**AND THE HIGHER THE DEGREE, THE BETTER THE SALARY.**

### Earnings by educational attainment, 2016



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics



# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

There are plenty of career opportunities for high school graduates who don't want (or aren't ready) to pursue college after high school. **Here are some tips for finding employment directly after high school.**

- **WORK WITH YOUR COUNSELOR** or the local employment office on developing a cover letter, resume, or personal website to help you apply for jobs
- **CONSIDER GETTING A PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION** license, accreditation, or an employability certificate (like the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate™) to boost your job prospects
- **DISCUSS EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS WITH YOUR COUNSELOR**, given your special talents and abilities
- **YOU CAN ALSO ASK YOUR COUNSELOR** about vocational and technical programs offered at your high school or nearby providers
- **IF YOU'RE ALREADY WORKING**, look into higher-level jobs with your current employer
- **LOOK FOR APPRENTICESHIPS** and other job training opportunities
- **LOOK AT EMPLOYMENT WEBSITES** opportunities and job requirements
- **ASK TO “JOB SHADOW”** at a local business to get a feel for the environment and expectations in jobs that pique your interest

# Question 1:

## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

### Exploring options besides college

Another post-high school option is serving in the US Armed Forces. Here, you can gain real world job skills and even scholarship opportunities that might lead you to a college path. You can also serve while attending college.

- **STOP BY YOUR LOCAL MILITARY RECRUITERS’ OFFICE** or meet with recruiters during their visits to high school
- **INTERVIEW FAMILY AND FRIENDS** who have served
- **EVALUATE ANY PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS** that might prevent you from serving
- **COMPARE MILITARY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES** with job positions outside the military
- **COMPARE** benefits, tours of duty, training, and promotion opportunities of various military programs



# Question 1:

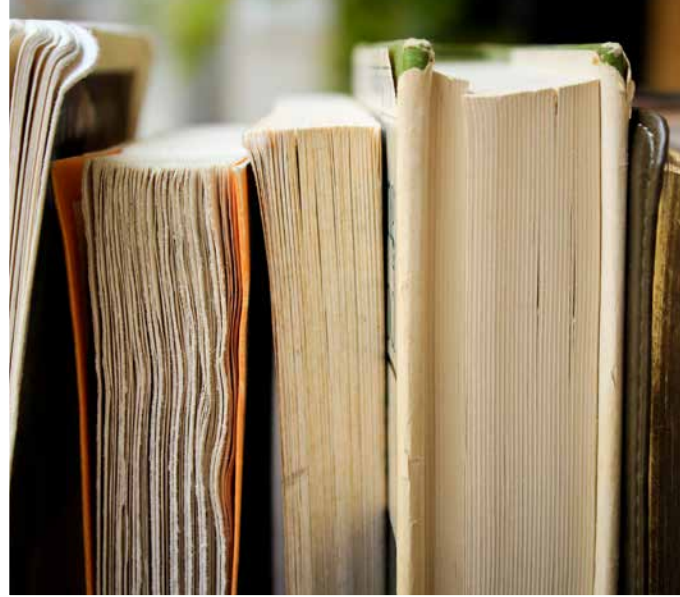
## ‘What Do I Want To Be?’

### Work skills you will need

According to ACT research, these are the top employability skills needed to perform virtually any job:

- **READING**  
(for information in manuals, instructions, etc.)
- **MATH**  
(and applying it to work tasks, such as measurement)
- **GRAPHIC LITERACY**  
(in workplace graphics, such as charts and graphs)
- **APPLIED TECHNOLOGY**  
(working with machines and equipment)
- **TEAMWORK**  
(understanding and performing your role within a team)
- **WRITING**  
(clear and error-free composition)
- **LISTENING**  
(following and understanding workplace processes)
- **OBSERVATION**  
(processes, demonstrations, etc.)

ACT keeps a database of the skill levels needed for virtually any job. **[CLICK HERE](#)** to search for the jobs in which you're interested.





# Question 2

**‘WHAT ARE MY PRIORITIES  
THIS YEAR?’**



“

**It is not a daily  
increase, but a  
daily decrease.  
Hack away at the  
inessentials.**

“

- BRUCE LEE

# Question 2:

## ‘What are my priorities this year?’

### Junior year priority: Get core courses covered

#### IT’S ALL ABOUT THE CORE.

You’ve likely gotten a chance to take at least some core courses during your first two years of high school. Core courses are a big priority because they give your brain the building blocks needed to be ready for college and your career.

According to ACT, your schedule should include the following courses:

- **ENGLISH**  
4 years
- **MATH**  
3 years (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)
- **SCIENCE**  
(including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics)
- **SOCIAL STUDIES**  
3 years
- **OTHER**  
Foreign language, visual and performing arts, computer science, and many more.

Why are these courses important? Most colleges require them for admission, for one—although requirements vary from college to college, so be sure to talk with

your counselor or look online for specific colleges’ requirements.

Secondly, what you learn in these classes will give you the well-rounded knowledge you’ll need later in life.



# Question 2:

## ‘What are my priorities this year?’

### Here are some more things to keep in mind when scheduling classes for your last two years of high school:

- Familiarize yourself with the **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS** of your school. What are you missing?
- Four years of **ENGLISH OR LANGUAGE ARTS** courses will strengthen your reading, writing, and speaking skills necessary for college or career.
- A series of **MATHEMATICS** courses is crucial as you prepare for 21st-century careers.
- Many colleges and universities require three years of **SOCIAL STUDIES** in high school.
- Like math, science skills are highly important to future jobs. Take at least three years of **SCIENCE**, including one laboratory course.
- Schedule at least a year of **VISUAL OR PERFORMING ARTS** classes, such as choir, band, theater, drama, or dance classes.
- Don't forget **ELECTIVES** courses! They're a great way to not only earn academic credit but to help you explore special interests.
- **FOREIGN LANGUAGE** courses are important for helping you understand the world and its people, but remember also that many colleges require foreign language credits to graduate, as well. You might even earn enough foreign language credits in high school to fulfill the requirement in college.
- You could be eligible to take classes at a community college or online for **DUAL CREDIT**. This is a great opportunity to earn college credit early (possibly for free—check with your high school) and get some real college experience in before making the leap. Ask your counselor for opportunities.
- You can also ask your school about **APPLIED ACADEMICS** courses, which use hands-on approaches to learning and often meet core course credit.
- Most students know how to use **COMPUTERS**, but your school probably offers electives on that topic if you need to play catchup.

# Question 2:

## ‘What are my priorities this year?’

### Junior year priority: Make high school count

You can make your junior and senior years the foundation for your whole future. Just make sure your plan includes the right priorities and gets the most out of your time in high school.

### GET TO CLASS (AND BE PRESENT)

“Ninety percent of success is showing up.” You might have heard that old saying from your parents or grandparents. It’s a good one to keep in mind—especially if “senioritis” is already starting to happen.

Attending class is about more than grades—it’s preparing you for more difficult classes, for college admissions tests, for jobs. Listen and participate.

### KEEP YOUR GRADES UP

Getting (and keeping) good grades is important. For one, your GPA is a huge factor in college admissions decisions. Secondly, your grades reflect how well you listened, participated, and performed in class.

Pay attention. Turn in assignments on time. Do your best.



# Question 2:

## ‘What are my priorities this year?’

### DEVELOP GOOD HABITS

Along with all the stuff you learn in the classroom, you can also learn good study habits—skills that will help you succeed in college and career and help develop a solid work ethic.

Consider a few pointers to give you an advantage in the classroom and to help you develop good habits.

- **READ THE NEWS REGULARLY** to build your reading skills and your understanding of the world.
- **FIND A DICTIONARY**—that book you sometimes need when autocorrect isn’t an option—and look up words you don’t know. Build your vocabulary a little bit every day.
- **DISCOVER A QUIET PLACE TO STUDY.**  
Find a place that’s free of distractions and noise where you won’t be interrupted. Ask your parents, guardians, or teachers for recommendations.
- **PLAN A DAILY HOMEWORK SCHEDULE,**  
and stick to it.
- **TRY TO SIT NEAR THE FRONT OF THE CLASSROOM** during class time. Studies show students who sit there get better grades.
- **GET A SUPPORT SYSTEM** of friends and family —“study buddies” to help you get ready for tests, complete homework, and even proofread your essays and reports.
- **USE YOUR LIBRARY.** Believe it or not, you won’t find all the answers online (and you can’t even be sure they’re factually correct). Get a library card, make your librarian your new best friend, and you’ll be surprised how much the content of your work improves.



## Question 2:

# 'What are my priorities this year?'

### Junior year priority: Make extracurriculars count

Colleges and employers love extracurricular activities. They build teamwork skills. They make you more creative. They show there's more to you than just book smarts.

Most schools have extracurricular activities that fit just about every student: athletes, "mathletes," thespians, musicians, builders, gamers, artists, extroverts, introverts ... all kinds of personalities. There's a team or group waiting for you.

Use your extracurricular experience in your college, internship, or job applications. It not only enhances your skill set, it shows who you are as a person. That can help with developing relationships with employers, coworkers, and fellow students.



# Question 3

**‘WHAT’S MY COLLEGE AND  
CAREER PLAN?’**



“

**Someone is  
sitting in the shade  
today because  
someone planted a  
tree long ago.**

”

- WARREN BUFFETT



# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Junior year priority: Put your plan to work

Once you’ve developed a better sense of your direction after high school, it’s time to make your plan work for you.

**IS COLLEGE YOUR DESTINATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?** There are three big factors colleges and universities consider when accepting applicants:

- **HIGH SCHOOL GRADE POINT AVERAGE (HSGPA)**
- **HIGH SCHOOL COURSE SELECTION**
- **COLLEGE READINESS ASSESSMENT SCORES (ACT®, SAT®)**

That means your grades should be in line with what’s expected at college, and you’ll need to prepare to take a college readiness assessment. Most students take one for the first time during their junior year.

Check with your counselor or the admissions department at your desired college or university to see how your grades match up to their requirements.



# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Identify your support network

Planning for college may seem a little scary (especially if you’re a first-generation college student). But if you get help from the right people, you’ll not only be more likely to get into college, it’s more likely you’ll succeed there. Create a support network of people who can help.

- **FAMILY MEMBERS**—If your family supports you, you’re a step ahead. If it seems like they’re not as focused on college as you are, start involving them in discussions about what you want from your future. Share what you’ve learned about college and career opportunities. Encourage them to talk to your teachers, counselor, or principal. Ask them to go with you on college visits. And explain to them that going to college or starting a career doesn’t mean leaving behind your family and community.
- **YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR**—We’ve mentioned this person a lot, and that’s because he or she can be very helpful when it comes to planning your path beyond high school. Don’t wait for your counselor to contact you. Many counselors help hundreds of students, so step up and ask questions. Make an appointment to talk about college. Ask for advice on courses to take and resources to help you.
- **FIND A MENTOR**—This is a person with knowledge and experience who can help you achieve goals. Mentors can come from formal mentorship programs (like Junior Achievement) or people you know from your school, neighborhood, church, internship programs, volunteer organizations, sports teams ... anyone who can provide informed support and guidance.
- **OTHER STUDENTS**—Yes, your friends can be mentors, especially if they are a little further along in school or in college and career planning. Tell them your goals and encourage each other. Avoid anyone who tries to discourage or sidetrack you.

# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Learn how to learn

Developing good habits in the classroom now will make a huge difference when you get into college. Now is the time to improve those habits and skills. If you follow these tips, you’ll not only get more out of class, you’ll probably enjoy being there!

- **JOIN IN ON CLASS DISCUSSIONS.** Don’t sit quietly in the back—get engaged in the classroom.
- **ASK QUESTIONS IF YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING.** As the old adage goes: if you didn’t understand it, there’s a good chance others didn’t either.
- **KEEP UP WITH CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.** Keep a checklist of when they’re due—or finish them before the due date.
- **CHECK FOR PHONE APPS** to remind you about deadlines, assignments, and exams.
- **ASK FOR HELP** when you’re falling behind.
- **LOOK FOR WAYS TO SHARPEN YOUR BASIC SKILLS** in every class. Practice writing in social studies. Practice algebra during science projects. Use science skills during vocational education classes.
- If you haven’t already, **LEARN KEYBOARDING SKILLS.** Learn how to take good class notes. Pay close attention when learning. Learn to proofread, correct, and rewrite your written work.
- **DEVELOP GOOD TEST-TAKING SKILLS,** like reading the whole question before answering and leaving time to double-check your answers.



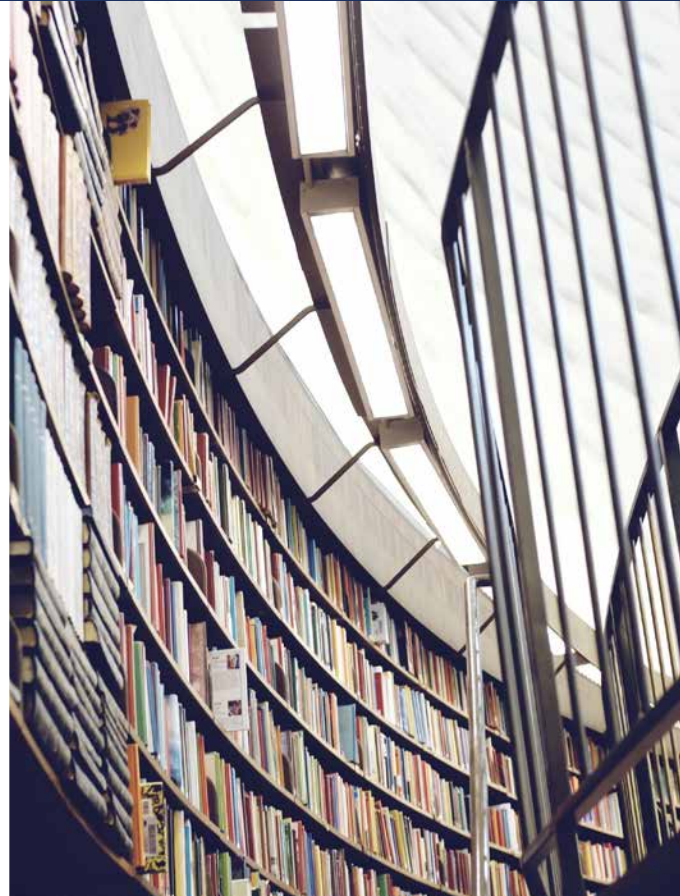
# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Why college?

We’ve covered that additional education after high school can increase your pay and your job security. There are other good reasons to consider college—including being able to **MEET NEW PEOPLE, HAVE NEW EXPERIENCES**, and **TAKE ON NEW CHALLENGES**.

If you decide to go the college route, the next step is make a plan to get there.



# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### College considerations

- **TWO-YEAR VS. FOUR-YEAR:** Some students choose to start out at a two-year community or technical college, which are often closer to home and more affordable, and they award two-year associate’s degrees, which is all that’s required in some careers.
- **PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC:** If you choose the four-year college route, you’ll need to decide between a publicly or privately funded college or university. Private colleges are often smaller, with fewer students, more access to faculty, and better chances of getting into programs and classes. They’re also typically more expensive than public colleges but with a larger student population.

### WHICH TYPE OF COLLEGE YOU CHOOSE WILL DEPEND ON MANY FACTORS:

- **YOUR COMFORT LEVEL**  
(class size, distance from home, etc.)
- **WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD**
- **WHICH COLLEGE IS THE BEST FIT TO YOUR PROGRAM OF STUDY**

By starting now, you’ll have plenty of time to figure out which one is the best fit for you.



# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Build your college knowledge

There are all kinds of ways to learn more about colleges. First, make contact with colleges you’re interested in.

**VISIT COLLEGE CAMPUSES.** Talk to your counselor and parents about visiting campuses you’re interested in, and create a list of questions to ask during those visits, including:

- What’s the total cost for attending?
- What financial aid is available, and how do I apply?
- How successful are your graduates at finding jobs? Ask specifically for a percentage of student placement in jobs after graduation.
- How easy is it to get into classes?
- How many students are in each class?
- What’s campus life like (clubs, activities, recreation, etc.)?
- Where do first-year students live?
- What activities and services will help me when I first get to campus?
- How easy is it to meet with faculty?
- What other services are available on campus—health care, transportation, etc.?

- **PAY ATTENTION** when colleges come to you, either through college fairs at or near your school and when representatives from colleges visit your school. It’s never too early to meet with college reps about your goals and interests—and it’s never too early to ask questions.
- **READ ABOUT COLLEGE AND FINANCIAL AID.** The more you read, the better you’ll understand how things work. Get some reading materials from your counselor, including brochures and catalogs sent to the counseling office, as well as a list of college websites.
- **START BOOKMARKING WEBSITES OF COLLEGES YOU’RE INTERESTED IN.** Check back with them throughout your junior year so you get a feel for the kinds of deadlines you’ll need to keep track of next year.
- **START COMPILING A LIST OF SCHOLARSHIPS** you might be able to access next year. Talk to seniors for advice on scholarships they’re earning.



# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### What to consider when comparing colleges

- **LOCATION**
  - Distance from home
- **SIZE**
  - Enrollment
  - Physical size of campus
- **ENVIRONMENT**
  - Two-year or four-year
  - School setting (rural, urban)
  - Location and size of nearest city
  - Student population
    - (coed, men only, women only)
  - Religious affiliation
- **ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**
  - Tests required
  - Average test score, GPA, rank
  - Deadline
- **ACADEMICS**
  - Is your major offered?
  - Special requirements
  - Accreditation
  - Student/faculty ratio
  - Typical class size
- **COLLEGE EXPENSES**
  - Tuition, room, and board costs
- **FINANCIAL AID OFFERED**
  - Request forms
  - Typical percentage receiving aid
  - Scholarships available
  - Deadline
- **HOUSING**
  - Residence hall requirement
  - Food plan
- **FACILITIES**
  - Academic
  - Recreational
- **ACTIVITIES**
  - Clubs, organizations
  - Greek life (fraternities, sororities)
- **CAMPUS VISITS**
  - Dates
  - Special opportunities

# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Paying for college

Ah, the big question:

#### HOW WILL I PAY FOR ALL OF THIS?

College can be expensive, and even if it can lead you to higher-paying careers after you graduate, you’ll need to figure out if enough funds are available to pay as you go or if you need to take loans to pay for it later.

But don’t let financial worries get you down. Fortunately, there is a lot of financial help available, and your junior year is a great time to start finding it. There are plenty of need-based (depending on your family’s financial situation) and merit-based (depending on your grades and performance) financial aid options available.

#### YOU CAN RECEIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM:

- Your state
- The federal government
- Your chosen college
- Private scholarships and assistance

#### THERE ARE SEVERAL KINDS OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:

- **SCHOLARSHIPS**—These are usually based on your GPA, test scores, and/or exceptional ability (athletic, artistic, academic)
- **GRANTS**—These are usually based on your financial need
- **LOANS**—Borrowed money that will need to be repaid eventually
- **WORK PROGRAMS**—Employment through the college

# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Paying for college

Your counselor and a college’s financial aid office can give you more information about applying for financial assistance, and you can research your options online.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

(click each to find out more)

- **ACT** – More information from ACT about financial aid and where to find it
- **FEDERAL STUDENT AID** (from the US Department of Education) – A list of federally funded scholarships, fellowships, grants, and internships geared to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students
- **FAFSA** – The Free Application for Federal Student Aid
- **FINAID** – Features a free scholarship search function and information on loans, savings programs, and military aid
- **STUDENT AID ALLIANCE** – Contains student success stories, descriptions of aid programs, lobbying tools, and legislative updates





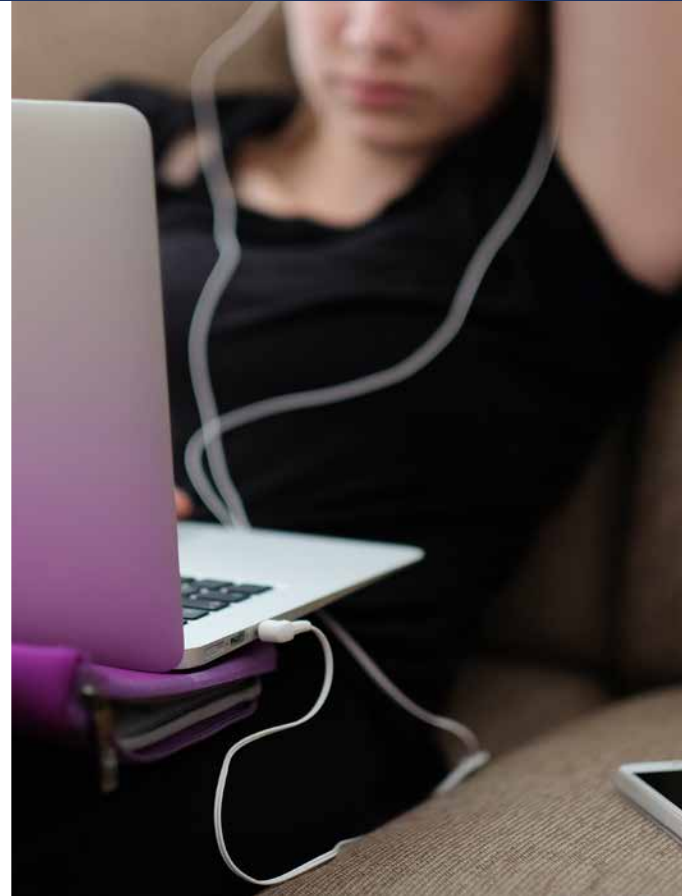
# Question 3:

## ‘What’s my college and career plan?’

### Watch out for scams

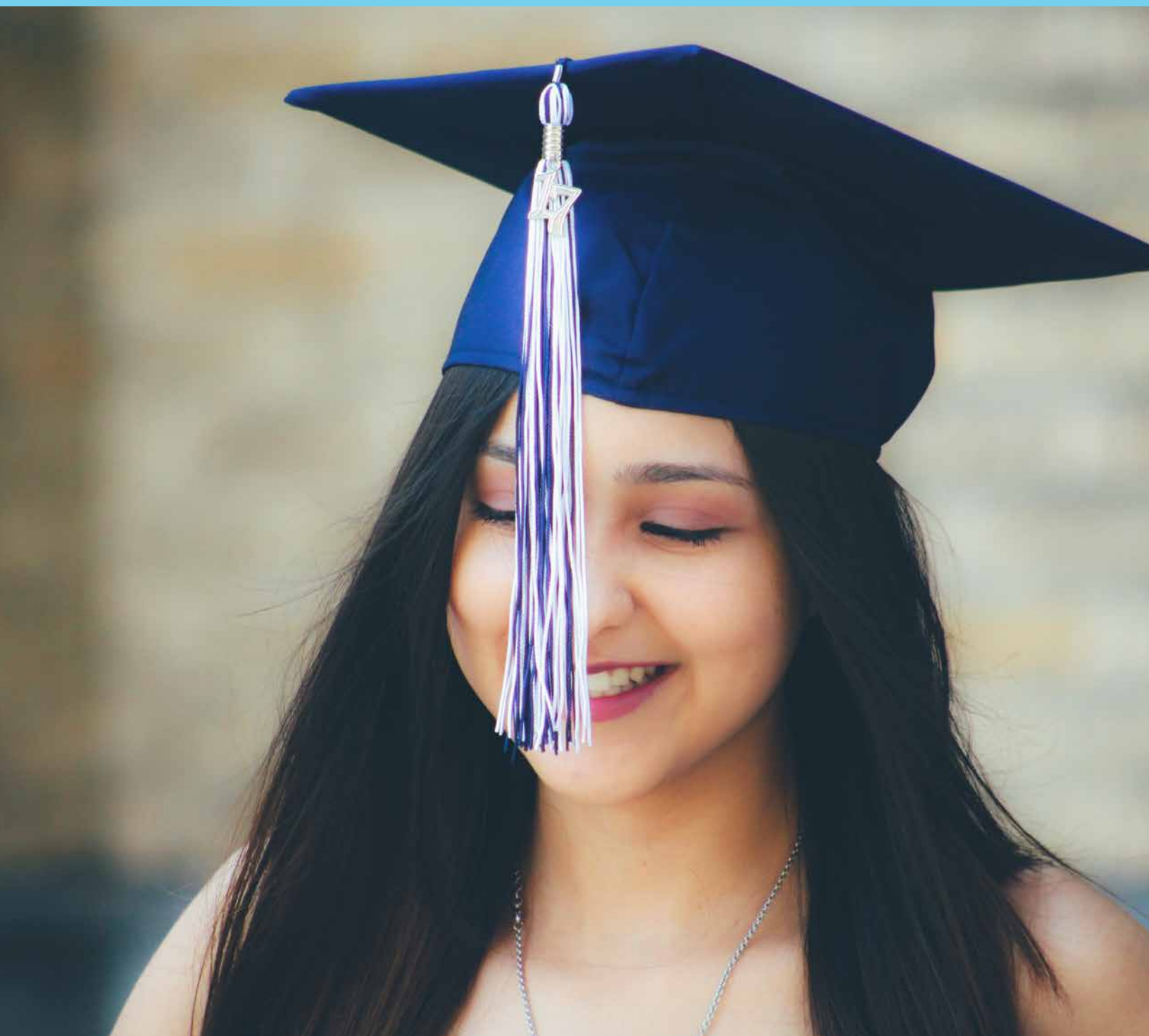
Unfortunately, some people take advantage of students’ need for financial aid. Watch out for emails, texts, and phone calls with the following claims, which are signals that the service is probably not for real:

- ***“This scholarship is guaranteed, or your money back.”***
- ***“You’re a finalist” or “you’ve been selected”*** for a scholarship for which you didn’t apply.
- ***“You can’t get this information anywhere else.”***
- ***“We do all the work.”***
- ***“Can I get your credit card, social security, or bank routing number to hold this scholarship?”***
- ***“The scholarship will cost you some money.”***



# Question 4

**'AM I READY FOR COLLEGE?'**



“

**It isn't the  
mountains ahead  
to climb that  
wear you down.  
It's the pebble in  
your shoe.**

“

- MUHAMMAD ALI



# Question 4:

## ‘Am I ready for college?’

**The best way to figure out if you’re ready for college courses is to take a college readiness assessment.**

We know, we know—testing isn’t much fun. It takes time, it causes stress, and testing means you can’t sleep in on a Saturday.

However, most colleges and universities require or recommend that students submit test results as part of the application process. The two leading college readiness assessments are the ACT and the SAT.

There’s been a lot of news in the education world lately about the SAT (which used to test cognitive ability) becoming more like the ACT, which tests what’s taught in the high school classroom. Many students are comfortable with the ACT because it tests what they’re already learning, and it always has. The ACT is taken by more college-bound students than any other test, and it’s accepted by every four-year college and university in the United States.

The ACT includes tests in four areas—English, math, reading, and science—and is designed to measure your current level of education in these subjects. The ACT also has an optional writing test. The SAT currently measures reading, writing, and math abilities.

Taking the ACT or SAT is an important step in planning your future after high school. There are plenty of ways to prepare (see the end of this book for more tips on how to prepare for the ACT), but since they focus on testing you on what you’ve learned in the classroom, the best way to prepare is to do your best in school.

# Question 4:

## 'Am I ready for college?'

### How college readiness assessments are used

When colleges make decisions about admission, they want to know the whole student. They realize you're more than just a score, and that's why they ask for so much information when you apply.

Nearly all colleges use assessment results because they reflect if you're ready for first-year college-level courses. But they use your test results in tandem with other factors, such as your GPA and class rank.

Colleges might also use what they learn about you from your assessment for course placement, academic advising, career counseling, and scholarship awards. How well you do on a college readiness assessment will affect all these things, so it's important to do your best.



# Question 4:

## ‘Am I ready for college?’

### When to take a college readiness assessment

Lots of factors affect when you should test, such as whether the college you’re interested in has an application deadline, or a program or scholarship you want to pursue requires a test score.

That’s why waiting until your senior year to test, especially your first time, may be too late. Many students choose to test a second time their senior year in hopes of raising their scores. Testing the first time in the spring of your junior year gives you the time for that option.

### THERE ARE OTHER ADVANTAGES TO TESTING YOUR JUNIOR YEAR:

- Colleges will know your interests and scores and will have time to contact you during the summer before your senior year. Many colleges send information about admission, advanced placement, scholarships, and special programs to prospective students during this time.
  - You’ll have information about yourself and the schools you’re interested in before you go on campus visits, which will help you focus during those visits.
  - You’ll have a chance to retest if you feel your scores didn’t accurately reflect your ability. ACT research shows that 57% of students who took the test more than once increased their ACT Composite score.
- You’ll have completed most of the coursework that’s reflected on the test.
  - You’ll have test scores and information in time to influence your senior year; for example, you’ll have time to take additional courses if your score in a certain subject was low.

# Question 4:

## 'Am I ready for college?'

### How to prepare for college readiness assessments

Again, many people get nervous when they take tests because a lot is at stake. But don't worry! Whether you know it or not, you've been preparing for these tests since you started high school, and the exam is designed to measure general academic development.

To keep test anxiety at a minimum, be sure to read up on what the test is about and how best to take it. See the next page for some test-taking tips that will make the experience go a lot smoother, especially the first time.





# Question 4:

## 'Am I ready for college?'

### 12 tips for taking a college readiness assessment

1. The day before the test: gather everything you need (approved calculator, test ticket, sharpened pencils, photo ID), check the registration time and location, and know how to get there
2. Get plenty of sleep the night before the test
3. Wear comfortable clothing and eat a healthy breakfast the day of the test
4. As you get started, take a few deep breaths to calm yourself
5. Keep a positive attitude—that can make all the difference
6. Listen carefully to instructions and ask questions if you hear something you don't understand
7. Focus your attention entirely on your work
8. Position your answer sheet right next to your test booklet so you can mark answers quickly and accurately
9. Read each question and possible responses completely before answering. If you're not sure of the answer, choose the one you think is best and move on.
10. Be sure to answer every question—there's no penalty for guessing
11. Pace yourself and occasionally check the time
12. If you finish before time is up, reread the questions and check your answers



# Question 5

**‘HOW SHOULD I PREPARE THE  
NEXT TWO YEARS?’**



“

**The future  
belongs to those  
who believe in  
the beauty of  
their dreams.**

“

- ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



## Question 5:

‘How should I prepare the next two years?’

**Some days, it might seem like school is taking forever to finish. But this year and especially next year, you’ll probably realize how fast graduation is coming. Are you ready for what comes after graduation?**

How you spend your junior and senior years will make all the difference. The trick is to plan out small steps leading to the big leap into college and career.

The next few pages map out a step-by-step path to make sure you have all the future-planning bases covered during your junior and senior years.

**LET’S START WITH WHAT YOU SHOULD KEEP IN MIND EARLY IN YOUR JUNIOR YEAR.**





# Question 5:

## ‘How should I prepare the next two years?’

### Two-year timeline

#### JUNIOR YEAR: SEPTEMBER TO JANUARY

**WHAT TO DO:** Think about your reasons for going to college. What are your goals? What learning opportunities are most important to you? Do your college plans include plans for after college?

**HOW TO DO IT:** Talk with your college and career mentors (parents, counselors, teachers, friends) and investigate possible career options and the degree levels involved in each.

#### JUNIOR YEAR: JANUARY TO MARCH

**WHAT TO DO:** Identify important factors in choosing a college (if that’s your chosen path). Two-year or four-year? Location? Cost? Atmosphere? Variety of study programs available? Entrance fee requirement?

**HOW TO DO IT:** Focus on your goals and career interests. Consult college guidebooks and websites. Set up an ACT Profile account and explore college and careers. Prepare and register for a college readiness assessment.

#### JUNIOR YEAR: MARCH TO JUNE

**WHAT TO DO:** List your top colleges and collect information. Have you included all possible choices? What information do you need? How can you get it?

**HOW TO DO IT:** Attend college fairs and “college night” programs. Go on college visits. Take your college readiness assessment (at least once).

#### SUMMER BETWEEN JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS

**WHAT TO DO:** Make your summer count. It can be a real growth and planning opportunity, and it can help focus the planning you’ll need to do your senior year.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Pursue a summer job that corresponds with your career interests ... and earn and save some money for college. Or, look for volunteer or job-shadowing opportunities so you can see your dream career up close or explore ideas of what you might want to do.

*(Continued on next page)*

# Question 5:

## ‘How should I prepare the next two years?’

### Two-year timeline (cont).

#### SENIOR YEAR: AUGUST

**WHAT TO DO:** Compare the colleges on your list. Have you weighed pros and cons carefully? Which colleges meet your needs?

**HOW TO DO IT:** Continue visiting colleges and college websites. Organize your college choices into a detailed pro/con list. Pay special attention to colleges with the biggest “pros” lists.

#### SENIOR YEAR: SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER

**WHAT TO DO:** Apply for admission to your top-choice colleges. Do you have all the necessary forms and information about yourself? Double-check the application deadlines, and put them on your calendar.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Obtain application forms online, or with the help of your counselor. Observe deadlines. Submit transcripts and test scores (and retest, if necessary, to give you your best score).

#### SENIOR YEAR: JANUARY TO FEBRUARY

**WHAT TO DO:** Apply for financial aid. Have you investigated all possible sources of aid? When should you apply?

**HOW TO DO IT:** Talk to your counselor or your top colleges’ financial aid offices. Get all the financial aid application forms and watch for deadlines. Complete the FAFSA form as soon as possible.

#### SENIOR YEAR: FEBRUARY TO MAY

**WHAT TO DO:** Make your final decisions. What additional preparation might be helpful? Should you consider summer school? Do you feel comfortable with your final choice?

**HOW TO DO IT:** Talk with your mentors about your final choice and ask them to help you confirm your decision. Decline other admission offers—colleges are holding space for you, and your decline could free up room for other students.

**CONGRATS, GRADUATE!**

# One last thing...

**This guide was designed to give you useful advice, tips, and strategies you can use the next two years to prepare you for life after high school.**

The most important tip we can give you: ***be confident in yourself!*** Having a positive attitude will get you far. If you work hard, that discipline will pay off in college and/or your career!

Your curiosity, hard work, and perseverance will make all the difference.

**BEST OF LUCK!**



# Find out more about the ACT test

## Paying for college

- **WHY TAKE THE ACT**—Reasons why the ACT might be the right choice for you.
- **ACT TEST DATES AND SIGNUP**—More information about test dates, locations, fees, and much more.
- **MORE TOOLS FOR ACT TEST PREP**—ACT also offers many free and affordable tools to help you prepare to take the test.
- **PREPARING FOR TEST DAY**—This FREE booklet contains information about how to prepare for the ACT, including detailed descriptions of each subject area test.
- **YOUR SCORES AND WHAT TO DO WITH THEM**—Information about viewing, sending, and understanding your scores, including recent enhancements to the score reporting to help you with career planning.





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